



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Female migrant workers navigating the service economy in Shanghai

Home, beauty, and the stigma of singlehood

Ip, T.T.

Publication date

2018

Document Version

Other version

License

Other

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Ip, T. T. (2018). *Female migrant workers navigating the service economy in Shanghai: Home, beauty, and the stigma of singlehood*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

**Female Migrant Workers Navigating the Service
Economy in Shanghai:
Home, Beauty, and the Stigma of Singlehood**

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus

prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde

commissie, in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel

op donderdag 20 september 2018, te 12.00 uur

door

Tsz Ting Ip

geboren te Hong Kong

Promotiecommissie

| | | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Promotor: | prof. dr. ir. B.J. de Kloet | Universiteit van Amsterdam |
| Co-promotor: | prof. dr. E. Peeren | Universiteit van Amsterdam |
| Overige leden: | prof. dr. L.A. Bialasiewicz | Universiteit van Amsterdam |
| | prof. dr. C. Brosius | Heidelberg University |
| | prof. dr. M.J.H. Meijer | Maastricht University |
| | prof. dr. W. Sun | University of Technology Sydney |
| | dr. S. Lan | Universiteit van Amsterdam |
| | dr. R. Spronk | Universiteit van Amsterdam |

Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen

This work was supported by the Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) under the funded-project “Creating the ‘New’ Asian Woman: Entanglements of Urban Space, Cultural Encounters and Gendered Identities in Shanghai and Delhi” (SINGLE Project Nr: 586, 2013-2016). The HERA SINGLE project is coordinated by Prof. Christiane Brosius (Heidelberg University, DE), Dr. Melissa Butcher (Birkbeck, University of London, UK), and Prof. Jeroen de Kloet (University of Amsterdam, NL).

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Table of Contents | iii |
| Publication History | vi |
| Author Contributions | viii |
| Acknowledgements | x |
| Introduction: | |
| Female Migrant Workers Navigating the Service Economy in Shanghai | 1 |
| Methodology | 16 |
| Affective Labor and Beyond | 24 |
| Home, Beauty, and the Stigma of Singlehood: Chapter Outline | 27 |
| References | 44 |
| | |
| PART I HOME | 58 |
| | |
| Chapter 1: | |
| “At Home in Shanghai?” Rural Migrant Women and the Cultural Politics of Jia | 59 |
| Introduction | 59 |
| Migration, Gender, and Home | 62 |
| Methods | 68 |
| A Discourse of <i>Jia</i> (“Home”) | 71 |
| “Home is...”: Familial Home, Hometown, and Affective Home | 73 |
| Working with Confucius | 77 |
| The Multiplicity of “Home” | 81 |
| Conclusion | 87 |
| References | 89 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Chapter 2: | |
| The Precarity of Trust: Domestic Helpers as “Working-Singles” in Shanghai | 95 |
| Introduction | 95 |
| Method | 98 |
| Trust and Mistrust: Domestic Helpers’ Everyday Life | 99 |
| Working as an <i>Ayi</i> | 104 |
| Honesty | 112 |
| Professionalism | 121 |
| Care | 128 |
| Conclusion | 135 |
| References | 138 |
| | |
| PART II BEAUTY | 142 |
| | |
| Chapter 3: | |
| Desiring Singlehood? Rural Migrant Women and Affective Labor in the Shanghai Beauty Parlor industry | 143 |
| Introduction | 143 |
| Methods | 151 |
| The Chinese Beauty Economy | 154 |
| Shanghai’s Beauty Parlor Industry | 155 |
| Apprentice | 157 |
| Senior | 168 |
| Entrepreneur | 184 |
| Closure | 197 |
| References | 200 |
| | |
| Chapter 4: | |
| Migrant Women Walking Down the Cheap Road: Modernization and Being Fashionable in Shanghai | 205 |
| Introduction | 205 |
| (Un)fashionability of Rural Migrant Women | 210 |
| Methodology | 214 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| The Materiality of the “Modern” | 216 |
| Visualizing the “Modern” | 224 |
| The Spatiality of <i>Tu</i> and “Modern” | 234 |
| Conclusion | 243 |
| References | 247 |
| | |
| PART III THE STIGMA OF SINGLEHOOD | 252 |
| | |
| Chapter 5: | |
| Exploiting the Distance between Conflicting Norms: Female Rural-to-Urban Migrant Workers in Shanghai Negotiating Stigma around Singlehood and Marriage | 253 |
| Introduction | 253 |
| Methodology | 256 |
| Norms Governing Singlehood and Marriage in Rural and Urban China | 259 |
| Stigmatization and How to Counter It | 266 |
| Adhering to the Norm – But What Norm? | 271 |
| Stretching the Norm and Countering Stigmatization | 276 |
| Conclusion | 285 |
| References | 287 |
| | |
| Conclusion: | |
| Past, Present, and Future(s) | 294 |
| Past: Outsider and Researcher | 294 |
| Now: Five Chapters and Multiple Lives | 298 |
| Future(s) | 300 |
| References | 306 |
| | |
| References (Full List) | 309 |
| | |
| Summary | 338 |
| | |
| Samenvatting | 347 |

Publication History

Due to the funding requirements, this Ph.D. research was developed as a journal-article-based dissertation, consisting of five chapters: three chapters are journal articles, and two chapters are book chapters in edited volumes. Because of this format, repetition in describing the context of the study and in the literature review at times occurs. The format of Chinese terms and translations, the description of the research participants' information, and the referencing styles of each chapter are based on the submitted and/or published version of the chapters. A list of all literature consulted is presented after the concluding section of the dissertation.

Chapter 1 **“At Home in Shanghai?” Rural Migrant Women and the Cultural Politics of *Jia***

Status: Resubmission

Journal: *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*

Chapter 2 **The Precarity of Trust: Domestic Helpers as “Working-Singles” in Shanghai**

Co-authored with Jeroen de Kloet

Status: Under review

Book Chapter: *Being Single in Urban Asia: Spaces and Mobilities, Pleasures and Precarities*, edited by Jeroen de Kloet, Christiane Brosius, Melissa Butcher, and Laila Abu-Er-Rub.

**Chapter 3 Desiring Singlehood? Rural Migrant Women and Affective Labor
in the Shanghai Beauty Parlor industry**

Status: Published

Journal: 2017. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 18 (4): 558-80. doi:
10.1080/14649373.2017.1387415.

**Chapter 4 Migrant Women Walking Down the Cheap Road: Modernization
and Being Fashionable in Shanghai**

Status: Published

Book chapter: 2018. In *The Routledge Companion to Modernity,
Space and Gender*, edited by Alexandra Staub, pp. 320-37.

**Chapter 5 Exploiting the Distance between Conflicting Norms: Female
Rural-to-Urban Migrant Workers in Shanghai Negotiating
Stigma around Singlehood and Marriage**

Co-authored with Esther Peeren

Status: Under review

Journal: *European Journal of Cultural Studies*

Author Contributions

Author's Initials

Penn Tsz Ting Ip (PI)

Jeroen de Kloet (JdK)

Esther Peeren (EP)

Chapter 2

The Precarity of Trust: Domestic Helpers as “Working-Singles” in Shanghai

Co-authored with Jeroen de Kloet (JdK)

JdK and PI outlined the research direction, research question, and theoretical framework in 2014. PI provided the literature review, designed the semi-structured interview questions, recruited research participants, conducted participatory observations and in-depth interviews, analyzed the fieldwork data, and prepared the first draft of the manuscript between 2014 and 2016. JdK reviewed the fieldwork materials, informant lists, and the analysis of the fieldwork data. JdK and PI revised all versions of the manuscript together and submitted it in 2018.

Chapter 5

**Exploiting the Distance between Conflicting Norms: Female Rural-to-Urban
Migrant Workers in Shanghai Negotiating Stigma around Singlehood and
Marriage**

Co-authored with Esther Peeren (EP)

EP and PI developed the research outline, performed the literature review, and determined the theoretical framework together. PI performed the fieldwork and recruited research participants, developed interview questions, and conducted in-depth interviews and participatory observation, with EP providing advice. PI provided the fieldwork data for analysis, which was reviewed and commented on by EP. Both EP and PI analyzed the fieldwork materials and wrote the first draft together. EP revised and commented on the first draft of the manuscript. Both authors revised and reviewed the final manuscript.

Acknowledgements

Amsterdam is my Neverland. In this dreamland, I always feel at home and am always welcomed for being who I am. Here I have also pursued my dream, this Ph.D. degree, with incredible support that I could never dare to have dreamed of.

First, I would like to acknowledge my supervisor, Jeroen de Kloet, and co-supervisor Esther Peeren, for supporting my Ph.D. study with their insightful advice and patience when eliminating my outlandish ideas on theories and methodologies. Without their suggestions, I would not have finished this dissertation until 2046. Jeroen de Kloet, you are more than a supervisor to me. I began as a Research Master student in Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam (UvA). In my elective class, Beyond Europe, I was first attracted by your intelligence and sense of humor, and later in the TransAsia Reading Group, by your personality and the positive vibes you give off. The way you care about the students, especially the Asian students who feel lost in the European education environment, impressed me affectively. I had wished to be your Ph.D. student since 2011. I was lucky, and am still lucky, that I can be one of the students in your academic family. I still remember the

first time we met – I had the rainbow P.S. zebra printed on my t-shirt and then I saw yours. This fashion sensibility was what guided me to write Chapter 4 of this dissertation. Esther Peeren, you may have never noticed how much I admire and respect you. Your efficiency, your work attitude, and your deep knowledge and familiarity with theories, have demonstrated to me the perfect way that a scholar should be. Your super-sonic speed in replying to my emails enabled me to adjust my fieldwork direction instantly when I was in Shanghai. I remember the times I was lost when I returned from the field and you cleared up my confusion and helped me to find a focus in my fieldwork materials. I am deeply thankful for the kindness with which you provided your support and spent your precious time in Amsterdam for me. Thank you both for assisting me to feel at home in this beautiful city.

I would also like to thank Yiu Fai Chow; without your guidance, I could not have arrived at this stage. Meeting you in Hong Kong in the summer of 2011 reminded me how much small world theory applies – I had already received the acceptance letter from the UvA and was preparing for my journey to Amsterdam. You arrived as the new professor at Hong Kong Baptist University, in the same department where I had studied for my bachelor degree in 2001. Two weeks later, we met again in

Amsterdam. You changed my entire mindset of working and living as a person – you told me to “enjoy.” My previous life had been about suffering and tolerance. It was a liberating moment to enjoy being who I am and what I can become. I enjoy working with you. Thank you for the generosity with which you gave the advice that became the torch of my journey.

I am deeply grateful to the members of my Ph.D. Committee, Luiza Bialasiewicz, Christiane Brosius, Shanshan Lan, Maaïke Meijer, Rachel Spronk, and Wanning Sun. I thank you for generously giving your time, advice, and support, and for your preparation for the defense. I express my appreciation to Yuk Wah Chan, Gladys Chong, Yiu Fai Chow, Pal Nyiri, Jack Qiu, and Gloria Wekker, for their thoughtful and inspiring suggestions at the early stage of my research. I would also like to express my thankfulness to Cindy Fan, Michelle Tsung-yi Huang, Kinneret Lahad, Fran Martin, Linda Peake, Martina Rieker, and Alexandra Staub for their insightful advice concerning my work.

My gratitude also goes out to the HERA-SINGLE team: Laila Abu-Er-Rub, Lucie Bernroider, Christiane Brosius, Melissa Butcher, Maddalena Chiellini, Yiu Fai Chow, Jeroen de Kloet, and Chenying Pi. I would also like to thank Tony Buchwald

and Nina Nessel from Heidelberg University for making the SINGLE team highly organized and efficient. I thank the Humanities in the European Research Area for funding this project. Travelling to Delhi, Leiden, Heidelberg, and Shanghai, our meetings and deliberations enlightened me and enabled me to think from the Chinese context to a cross-cultural one. I sincerely thank you all, my dear teammates.

I would also like to thank Eloë Kingma and Jantine van Gogh from the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) for their kind, generous, and heartfelt support. Eloë Kingma, every time I see you, I wish to give you a big warm hug. You give me not only support but also the strength to be who I am, and I enjoy my life, study, and work at the UvA all the more because of you. I am really fortunate that I have had such a great association with ASCA. I want to sincerely thank my fellow ASCA researchers: Peyman Amiri, Uzma Ansari, Murat Aydemir, Sruti Bala, Selçuk Balamir, Marie Beauchamps, Roxana Bedrule, Robin Celikates, Sudeep Dasgupta, Pedram Dibazar, Enis Dinc, Simon Ferdinand, Yolande Jansen, Blandine Joret, Annelies Kleinherenbrink, Jaap Kooijman, Christoph Lindner, Niall Martin, Miriam Meissner, Judith Naeff, Nur Ozgenalp, Patricia Pisters, Thomas Poell, Noa Roei, Suzanne Roggeveen, Mireille Rosello, Leonie Schmidt, Olga Sooudi, Eliza

Steinbock, Mikki Stelder, Hanneke Stuit, Jules Sturm, Lonneke van der Velden, Irene Villaescusa, Vesna Vravnik, Lucy van de Wiel, Thijs Witty, and Timothy Yaczo. I also thank the colleagues in our building, BG2, for their kind support and warm office chit-chat: Marten Jan Bok, Tessel Bauduin, and Sophie Berrebi. I would like to express my gratitude to our finance director, Digna van der Woude. Without your help, the financial management of our project would not be as smooth as it is. I would also like to thank Jobien Kuiper, Joan Mosselman, Dymph Verdiesen, and Swaan Levy Janssen for making our work environment wonderful. I am also grateful for the support of René Does, Gerard Duin, and Marc van Steekelenburg.

I thank my academic family, which, under Jeroen de Kloet's care and love, shared hotpots and picnics: Siyu Chen, Gladys Pak Lai Chong, Zoenie Deng, Enis Dinc, Simon Ferdinand, Hongfei Liu, Jian Lin, Arjen Nauta, Rowan Parry, Leonie Schmidt, Laura Vermeeren, Irene Villaescusa, Shuaishuai Wang, and Guohua Zeng, and our special academic fellows Henry Chow, Jori Snels, and Vincent So.

My deepest thanks to my paranymphs and trusted friends: Rowan Parry and Imara Limon. I also thank Adriana Ivanova, Jian Lin, and Brina Orožim for their kind assistance. Thank you very much for organizing the defense with me.

This dissertation is based on research conducted in Shanghai between 2014 and 2016. I am in debt to a number of friends and colleagues for encouraging me to begin the work, and for supporting me to finish it. In Shanghai, I am grateful to my friends, especially Alice Chen, Joyce Chen, Jingwen Fan, Yujie Guo, Lucetta Kam, Koushou, Walker Lee, Henri Liao, Cherie Lim, Mimi, Pheebie, Matilda Ting, Minh Uyên, Xiaoyan Wu, Xiangqi, and Xiaoshu. Lucetta Kam, thank you for being so supportive. My work could not be accomplished without your generous help. I also thank Qingling Guo, Xiaofei Li, and Wayne Li. In India, I thank Sheba Chhachhi, Oindrila Duttagupta, Sukrita Paul Kumar, Aparna Parikh, and Shilpa Phadke. In the United States of America, I would especially like to thank Bonnie, Faye, Anthony Jimenez, Chen Laoshi, Ge Laoshi, He Laoshi, Wenjie Liao, Ralph Litzenger, Peter Stambler, and his daughter Alexa Goff and her family.

In Amsterdam, I sincerely thank Herma Coumou, Popel Coumou, and Harrie Hageman. Harrie Hageman and Herma Coumou, I am so lucky to be a friend of yours. Thank you so much for taking care of me and supporting me. I also thank Dawn, S Goh, Jessie Gong, Jimmy Huang, C Jern Ken, Jian Lin, Steph Liu, Jennifer Pang, Rowan Parry and his family Anna Parshina, Ivan and Mira, as well as Xiaoxiao Xu,

Mu Xue, Skyler, Gong Ting, Simpson Tse, and Zhuoer Wang. Xiaoxiao Xu, thank you so much for your expertise and patience in editing the photographs printed in this study. I also take this opportunity to express a deep sense of gratitude to my classmates from the Research Master of Arts in Cultural Analysis: Karin Anzivino, Tessa Askamp, Reka Deim, Serap Kanay, Imara Limon, Deborah Mebius, Chelsea Oostdijk, Brina Orožim and Ewoud Visser. I would like to convey my gratitude to my beautiful friends who share my ups and downs: Frieda Charlotte, Adriana Ivanova, Johnson Leow, Sandra Roberts, Clara Martin Sanchez, and Meghan Schalkwijk. I also thank my fellow Ph.D. students who study in other Dutch cities; without their support and suggestions, I would not have arrived at this final stage of my Ph.D. student life: Doreen Chen, Shuyi Nina Huang, Rasa Naviskas, Katrine Smiet, Yujing Tan, and Evelyn Wan.

In Hong Kong, I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the support of the Department of Humanities and Creative Writing at Hong Kong Baptist University: Yiu Fai Chow, Gladys Chong, John Erni, Lucetta Kam, Amy Lee, Kwai Cheung Lo, Eva Kit Wah Man, Peter Stambler, and Daisy Tam. I also thank the Humanities Alumni Association: Edward Chow, Katy Kwok, KK Lam, Sui Lam, Kris Li, Beatrice

Liu, Ami Lo, Ste-Funni Tung, Priscilla Wai, Loretta Wong, Yvette Wong, Johnny Yip, Steph Yip, Tsui Man Yip, and Fiona Yu. I would also like to thank Stuart Christie, Kevin May and Lo Yin Shan. I thank Yuk Wah Chan, Nicholas Thomas, Angela Tse, and Katrina Yip, from the City University of Hong Kong, who supported my application to pursue the Research Master at the UvA. I thank my Hong Kong friends for their years of support and friendship: Amy, Besty, Bridget, Cabrini, Carol, Denise, Donna, Elaine, Fennie, Ivy, Katrina, Karyn, Manna, Ming & Sob, Pik Pik, Rick, Sammi, Sai Lo, Shukling, Sui, Tracy, Winny, and Zic.

My special acknowledgements are due to CRTV's Wenwen Chen, LillKiddy Lam, Frederick Man, and Hong Tong Wu, for giving me a wonderful experience working as a DJ for the Chinese Radio program in Amsterdam. It is my radiant sentiment to place on record my warmest regards to Ardi Bouwers from China Circle. I would also like to thank the excellent team from CinemAsia: Janet Lie, Martijn van Veen, Dewi Vrenegoorand, and Doris Yeung. I thank Amal Alhaag, Wayne Modest, and Ninja Rijnks-Kleikamp from Museum Volkenkunde for their professional support of HERA-SINGLE art exhibition and conference.

I would like to express my earnest gratitude to my editors and editorial friends;

without your professionalism, this work would not have been possible: Alexander Hindley, Patrick Jered, Stephanie Kwiatt, Karyn Law, Rowan Parry, and Katrina Yip. Patrick Jered, thank you very much for supporting me, I am forever indebted to you for your kindness.

To my grandparents, my extended family of uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews and nieces, who in one way or another shared their support, thank you for everything. I would like to thank the generous support from my Dutch relatives: Uncle Ma and Auntie Ma, and their son and his family, Calvin, Bo Kam, Jay and Ryan. Growing up in a big family in a village with a four-hundred-year history in Hong Kong is a treasure. Yet I have also experienced the suppression of the ingrained Chinese patriarchy since I was a child and have learned to be tough and independent. I have proven to the villagers and my extended family that there is nothing wrong with being born as a girl. Girls can be strong and successful, and my parents are more than happy to have me as their second daughter.

It is my radiant sentiment to place on record my deepest sense of gratitude to my family: Daddy and Mami, thank you for being with me no matter where I am. I could not have gotten this far without your endless support, love, and care. Being

away from you is harder than I expected, and I do miss you both dearly. Please accept my apologies for not being able to stay with you because I have a life goal that I must pursue. I wish you both to stay healthy and strong. Kenix, my dear sister, growing up with you is a venture. Your wisdom and courage have guided me through the brightest and darkest times of my life. I cannot thank you enough for your love and guidance. Morris, my brother, people think you are a lucky boy, but I know your path ain't easier than mine. Stay strong, your sisters are always here with you.

Luoyi, my love, my life partner, and my *parallel universe*, how can I thank you with words? The time we opened the umbrella together at the Bund, I knew your bravery and love would guide us to the future. I follow you: I thank you and your parents for all your love, support, and encouragement, with actions rather than words.

Last but not the least, I have to truly thank all the rural migrant women I met in Shanghai who made this research not only feasible but also full of precious memories.